CHAPTER 7

Linguistic Naturalism and Natural Style
From Varro and Cicero to Dionysius of Halicarnassus

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1 Introduction

> The most effective style ... is that which most resembles natural speech. And nature demands that the expression should follow the thought, not that the thoughts should follow the expression.
> (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Isocrates* 12.3–4)[1]

The Greek rhetorician and historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus was active in Rome at the end of the first century BC.[2] His extant works include a history of early Rome, critical letters, and rhetorical treatises with a focus on style: *On Composition*, *On Imitation, On Thucydides*, and *On the Ancient Orators*, including separate essays on Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, and Demosthenes. Engaged as he was in the oratory, history, and poetry of the classical Greek past, Dionysius himself lived in the Golden Age of Latin Literature. Born before 55 BC, he was a contemporary of Virgil and Horace. When Dionysius arrived in Rome in 30 BC, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) had been dead for more than a decade, but Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BC) was still alive. Dionysius used Varro's *Antiquities* as one of the principal sources for his own *Roman Antiquities*, as he indicates in several references.[3] He admired Varro as 'the most learned man of his age' (*Ant. Rom.* 2.21.2 ἀνὴρ τῶν κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίαν ἀκμασάντων πολυπειρότατος).

The concept of 'natural style' is very prominent in Dionysius' rhetorical works. He frequently praises the orator Lysias for his natural diction and

[1] Dionysius of Halicarnassus is cited according to the edition of Aujac 1978–1992 but in some passages I prefer the readings of Usener and Radermacher 1904–1929. References to *On Lysias* (*Lys.*), *On Isocrates* (*Isoc.*), *On Isaeus* (*Is.*), *On Demosthenes* (*Dem.*), *On Composition* (*Comp.*), and *On Thucydides* (*Th.*) give the chapters and paragraphs in Aujac's edition. Translations of Dionysius are adapted from Usher 1974–1985. Translations of Varro, Cicero, and Quintilian are adapted from Kent 1951, Hendrickson and Hubbell 1952, and Russell 2001 respectively.

[2] On Dionysius, see De Jonge 2008 and Wiater 2011.

[3] See Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.14.1, cf. 2.47.4, 2.48.4. For the text, see Cary 1937. Cf. Gabba 1991: 99–101.

word order, whereas he criticizes Thucydides for his unnatural grammatical constructions.[4] This paper will examine the relationship between Dionysius' concept of natural style and Roman accounts of linguistic naturalism, in order to cast light on the interaction between Greek and Latin scholarship in the Late Republic and Early Empire. I will first discuss the role of nature (φύσις) in Dionysius' stylistic theory (section 2). I will then examine three themes that connect Dionysius' views on natural style with contemporary discussions of linguistic naturalism in Varro and Cicero. First, there is the general concept of a natural style, which is associated with the Attic orators not only in Greek but also in Roman versions of Atticism (section 3). Second, there is the idea that nature plays a guiding role in the imposition of names (section 4). Finally, as Greek and Latin scholars are interested in language as the representation of reality, they believe that the structure of language should reflect the ontological order of nature. The latter idea can be found both on a theoretical level, in Varro's *De lingua Latina*, and on a practical level, in Dionysius' *De compositione verborum* (section 5).

Parallels between Dionysius' rhetorical works and Latin texts of the first century BC can be explained in various ways.[5] In some cases we may be inclined to acknowledge the influence of Roman authors on Dionysius' thinking: the *Antiquities* may not have been the only work by Varro that Dionysius knew, and he was probably also familiar with Cicero's rhetorical theories.[6] But similarities between Greek and Latin texts may also result from the use of a common source or tradition. Both Varro and Dionysius were deeply familiar not only with Alexandrian grammar, but also with Stoic philosophy. In his work *On Composition* (4.17–20) Dionysius refers to Chrysippus' treatises *On the Syntax of the Parts of Speech* (Περὶ τῆς συντάξεως τῶν τοῦ λόγου μερῶν), which he found rather disappointing not only because of the contents – the Stoic philosopher approached syntax from a logical rather than a rhetorical perspective –, but also because Chrysippus himself turned out to be such a boring writer. Dionysius complains that 'of writers who have been judged worthy of renown or distinction, none has written treatises on logic with more precision, and

[4] I have examined Dionysius' views on natural language and natural style in De Jonge 2008: 251–328. While this paper builds on that discussion, it adds a new perspective in exploring the Roman context of Dionysius' ideas.

[5] On Dionysius and Augustan Rome, see Hunter and De Jonge 2019.

[6] On Cicero and Dionysius, see De Jonge 2008: 214–16.

none has published discourses which are worse specimens of composition'.[7] Finally, parallels between Greek and Latin texts, like those between Dionysius and Varro, may also reflect a common discourse or a more general set of ideas that was shared by Greek and Roman intellectuals in Rome. Recent scholarship indeed strongly suggests that Greek and Roman scholars were not working in separate groups, but rather participating in one intellectual world, in which ideas were exchanged and knowledge shared.[8]

2 Dionysius on Natural Style

'Nature' (φύσις) runs as a constant theme through Dionysius' rhetorical works.[9] The term φύσις is applied to various aspects of writing: literary imitation may be natural, the general style of an orator can be 'natural', but also specific aspects of style, like vocabulary, word order, or composition.[10] Although some scholars have been keen to interpret Dionysius' emphasis on 'nature' as revealing a Stoic mindset, we should not forget that by the first century BC many Stoic ideas had become part and parcel of general intellectual discourse.[11] Furthermore, we should remember that Dionysius is first of all a teacher of rhetoric with a very practical agenda. In agreement with the principles of Atticism, he finds nothing more important than clarity (σαφήνεια): Dionysius wants his students to communicate lucidly, while avoiding poetic, obscure, or bombastic language. He presents Lysias as the primary model of clarity and natural language, while warning his students not to imitate the exotic vocabulary of Isocrates, the poetic figures of Plato, or the complex syntax of Thucydides.[12] In this context, the term 'natural' becomes almost a synonym for 'normal', 'usual', or 'familiar', but a more appropriate translation would be something like 'uncontrived', 'unconsidered', or 'inartistic'. In Dionysius' essays, φύσις is in most cases not used in opposition to θέσις (natural origin of language versus imposition of names) or to νόμος (natural correctness of names versus convention); in rhetorical contexts, the basic opposition is between φύσις and

[7] *Comp.* 4.17 τούτου γὰρ οὔτ' ἄμεινον οὐδεὶς τὰς διαλεκτικὰς τέχνας ἠκρίβωσεν οὔτε ἁρμονίᾳ χείρονι συνταχθέντας ἐξήνεγκε λόγους τῶν γοῦν ὀνόματος καὶ δόξης ἀξιωθέντων.

[8] See e.g. Asmis 1995 on Philodemus and Lucretius; De Jonge 2019 on Dionysius and Horace.

[9] Cf. De Jonge 2008: 250–3.

[10] On natural versus artistic imitation (μίμησις), see *Din.* 7.5.

[11] Aujac and Lebel 1981: 77 on *Comp.* 5.1 (see below): 'Est-ce une profession de foi stoïcienne?'

[12] Dionysius criticizes Plato's bombastic and poetic style in *Dem.* 5–7. In *Th.* 24 and *Amm.* 2 he objects to Thucydides' complex syntax as 'acquiring the appearance of solecism'. See De Jonge 2011.

τέχνη (nature versus art). 'Natural style', then, is the style that *imitates* the inartistic speech of laymen, who have not been trained to impress their audience with prose rhythm, figures of speech, and similar rhetorical tricks.[13]

For Greek rhetoricians the absolute champion of the 'natural' was the orator-speechwriter Lysias, who had many supporters in the first century BC thanks to the emergence of Roman and Greek Atticism.[14] Dionysius describes Lysias' style as 'displaying the natural to a high degree' (πολὺ τὸ φυσικὸν ἐπιφαίνουσα, *Lys.* 10.1), and representing 'the reality of human nature' (ἀλήθειαν ... φύσεως, *Lys.* 13.5). More particularly, Dionysius points out that the word arrangement in Lysias' speeches is natural (σύνθεσιν ... φυσικήν, *Isoc.* 2.4; cf. *Is.* 3.2), and he praises their 'moral character, which is not contrived, but natural' (ἦθός τε οὐ πεπλασμένον ἀλλὰ φυσικόν, *Is.* 9.1). The result is that 'a certain natural euphony and charm' flows over the speeches of Lysias (φυσική τις ... εὐστομία καὶ χάρις, *Dem.* 13.7). These different aspects of Lysias' writing are of course interconnected: natural composition and euphony are aspects of his natural style, which in its turn contributes to the natural (or realistic) portrayal of the speaker's character. It is important to observe that Dionysius does not use the word 'natural' in the sense of 'instinctive'. Far from being instinctive or inartistic, the speeches of Lysias are in fact, as Dionysius points out, the product of art (τέχνη), for 'to imitate nature was the greatest achievement of art' (τῆς τέχνης τὸ μιμήσασθαι τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς μέγιστον ἔργον ἦν, *Is.* 16.1: see also below).

Natural style is thus the style that consciously and artistically aims to represent the language of the layman (ἰδιώτης). The underlying idea is that professional orators are suspect, because their studied, thought-out, and artistic use of language was (since Gorgias) associated with lies, misleading, and deception. When analyzing the opening statement of a speech by Lysias (fr. 62), Dionysius points out that the orator's words display a moral flavour that is not contrived (πεπλασμένον) but natural (φυσικόν): 'Nobody would say that these are the words of an orator, but only that it is the language of any ordinary person (ἰδιώτης) who is exposed to unjust litigation.'[15] In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between the styles of Lysias and Isaeus (*Is.* 16.1–2):

[13] For a more extensive discussion of Dionysius' concept of natural style, see De Jonge 2008: 253–73.

[14] On Greek and Roman Atticism, see Wisse 1995 with further bibliography. For Lysias' purity and clarity, see e.g. Cic. *Orat.* 29; Dion. Hal. *Lys.* 4.1–3.

[15] Dion. Hal. *Is.* 9.1 οὐδεὶς ἂν εἴποι ῥήτορος εἶναι, ἀλλὰ παντὸς ἰδιώτου καταστάντος εἰς ἀγῶνα ἄδικον.

τοῦ Λυσίου μὲν οὖν τις ἀναγινώσκων τὰς διηγήσεις οὐδὲν ἂν ὑπολάβοι λέγεσθαι κατὰ τέχνην ἢ πονηρίαν, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια φέρει, αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἀγνοῶν τῆς τέχνης, ὅτι τὸ μιμήσασθαι τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς μέγιστον ἔργον ἦν. ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν Ἰσαίου διηγημάτων τοὐναντίον ἂν πάθοι, μηδὲν ὑπολαβεῖν αὐτοφυῶς καὶ ἀπραγματεύτως λέγεσθαι μηδ᾽ εἴ τινα ὡς ἔτυχε γενόμενα εἴρηται, ἐκ κατασκευῆς δὲ πάντα καὶ μεμηχανημένα πρὸς ἀπάτην ἢ ἄλλην τινὰ κακουργίαν.

Any reader of Lysias' narratives would suppose that no art (τέχνη) or dishonesty (πονηρία) had gone into their composition, but that they are written in accordance with nature and truth (ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια). He would not know that this illusion is itself the product of an art (τέχνη) whose greatest achievement was to imitate nature (μιμήσασθαι τὴν φύσιν). In the case of Isaeus' narratives he would receive the opposite impression, that not a single statement was spontaneous or unconsidered, not even when it described something as it actually happened, but that everything was artfully designed and contrived to mislead, or for some other sinister purpose.

In the examples that we have seen so far, 'the natural' corresponds to that which makes the impression of being 'unaffected', 'unconsidered', and 'uncontrived'. But Dionysius adds a more philosophical dimension to his concept of φύσις when he argues that natural style is also the style that follows the ideas (νοήματα) (*Isoc.* 12.3):

κράτιστον δὲ ἐπιτήδευμα ἐν διαλέκτῳ πολιτικῇ καὶ ἐναγωνίῳ τὸ ὁμοιότατον τῷ κατὰ φύσιν. βούλεται δὲ ἡ φύσις τοῖς νοήμασιν ἕπεσθαι τὴν λέξιν, οὐ τῇ λέξει τὰ νοήματα.

The most effective style to cultivate in political and forensic oratory is that which most resembles natural speech. And nature (φύσις) demands that the expression should follow the thought, not that the thoughts should follow the expression.

In the context of this passage, Dionysius is criticizing Isocrates for paying more attention to stylistic elegance than to the accurate presentation of subject matter: through the composition of periodical sentences and figures of speech, 'the thought often becomes slave to the rhythm of the words, and truthfulness is sacrificed to elegance' (δουλεύει γὰρ ἡ διάνοια πολλάκις τῷ ῥυθμῷ τῆς λέξεως καὶ τοῦ κομψοῦ λείπεται τὸ ἀληθινόν, *Isoc.* 12.3). If the form becomes more important than the contents, the speech will be obscure.

Natural style also requires that the organization of a text accurately reflect the chronological order of events in reality. In the narration of a Lysias speech the events are reported in the order in which they actually

happened, as this orator recounts an event 'as it was natural for it to *happen* and to be described' (ὡς φύσιν εἶχε γενέσθαι τε καὶ ῥηθῆναι, *Is.* 11.2). The speeches of Isaeus, on the other hand, are characterized by the fact 'that things that were done are told in other than their chronological order' (τῷ μὴ κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους τὰ πραχθέντα εἰρῆσθαι) and by the fact 'that everything is told neither as it was natural to have been done nor as a layman would recount it' (τῷ μὴ πάντα μηδ' ὡς φύσιν εἶχε πραχθῆναι μηδ' ὡς ἂν ἰδιώτης τις εἴποι λέγεσθαι, *Is.* 15.3). In the latter formulation, two different concepts of naturalism are combined: the unaffected language of untrained speakers is now identified with the language that closely corresponds to the order of reality.

This second concept of 'natural language', i.e. language that directly and accurately represents reality, deserves some further attention. One method that Dionysius frequently employs for his literary analysis is the rewriting (or metathesis) of classical texts.[16] When he finds that a certain passage in Plato, Thucydides, or Demosthenes is characterized by unnatural syntax or word order, Dionysius is not afraid to rearrange the original passage in what he considers a more 'natural' style. In many cases, Dionysius presents his own version of the passage as the basic, natural (one might almost say 'original') form, which underlies the 'contrived' literary passage that is actually found in classical literature. One instructive example is Dionysius' analysis of the opening sentence from Demosthenes' third *Philippic*:[17]

> Πολλῶν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, λόγων γινομένων ὀλίγου δεῖν καθ' ἑκάστην ἐκκλησίαν περὶ ὧν Φίλιππος, ἀφ' οὗ τὴν εἰρήνην ἐποιήσατο, οὐ μόνον ὑμᾶς ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἕλληνας ἀδικεῖ, . . .
>
> Many speeches, Athenians, are delivered in all but every assembly about the outrages that Philip, ever since he made peace with us, has been committing not only against you but also against the rest of the Greeks . . .

Dionysius points out that Demosthenes has in this passage adopted the stylistic character of Thucydides, which he considers highly unnatural (*Dem.* 9.3):

> κατὰ τί δὴ ταύτην ἡγοῦμαι τὴν λέξιν ἐοικέναι τῇ Θουκυδίδου; καθ' ὃ κἀκείνην πείθομαι μάλιστα διαφέρειν τῶν ἄλλων. τουτὶ δ' ἔστι τὸ μὴ κατ' εὐθεῖαν ἑρμηνείαν ἐξενηνέχθαι τὰ νοήματα μηδ', ὡς ἔστι τοῖς ἄλλοις σύνηθες λέγειν, ἁπλῶς καὶ ἀφελῶς, ἀλλὰ ἐξηλλάχθαι καὶ ἀπεστράφθαι τὴν

[16] On metathesis in Dionysius, see De Jonge 2005 and De Jonge 2008: 367–90.
[17] Dion. Hal. *Dem.* 9.2–8 on Dem. *Phil.* 3.1 and 13. Cf. De Jonge 2008: 259–60.

διάλεκτον ἐκ τῶν ἐν ἔθει καὶ κατὰ φύσιν εἰς τὰ μὴ συνήθη τοῖς πολλοῖς μηδ' ὡς ἡ φύσις ἀπαιτεῖ.

In what respect do I consider this style to resemble that of Thucydides? In that which I believe most distinguishes Thucydides' style from others: the expression of thought by indirect means, not simply and plainly, as is the normal practice of other writers, but in language removed and divorced from what is customary and natural (κατὰ φύσιν) and containing instead expressions which are unfamiliar to most people and not what nature demands (ὡς ἡ φύσις ἀπαιτεῖ).

Dionysius then rewrites the passage from Demosthenes in a more straightforward style, making three adaptations: he changes ὀλίγου δεῖν ('almost') into the simple σχεδόν; he resolves the hyperbaton by uniting ἀδικεῖ Φίλιππος ('Philip does wrong'), and he rewrites 'not only against you but also against the rest of the Greeks', replacing οὐ μόνον . . . ἀλλὰ καί . . . with the simple connectives τε καί ('you and the other Greeks'):

Demosthenes, *Philippics* 3.1:

Πολλῶν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, λόγων γινομένων ὀλίγου δεῖν καθ' ἑκάστην ἐκκλησίαν, περὶ ὧν Φίλιππος, ἀφ' οὗ τὴν εἰρήνην ἐποιήσατο, οὐ μόνον ὑμᾶς ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἕλληνας ἀδικεῖ . . .

Many speeches, Athenians, are delivered in all but every assembly about the outrages that Philip, ever since he made peace with us, has been committing not only against you but also against the rest of the Greeks . . .

Dionysius' metathesis:

Πολλῶν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, λόγων γιγνομένων καθ' ἑκάστην σχεδὸν ἐκκλησίαν, περὶ ὧν ἀδικεῖ Φίλιππος ὑμᾶς τε καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἕλληνας, ἀφ' οὗ τὴν εἰρήνην ἐποιήσατο . . .

Many speeches, Athenians, are delivered in almost every assembly about the outrages that Philip has been committing against you and the other Greeks ever since he made peace with us . . .

For our understanding of Dionysius' concept of natural style, it is important to observe that Dionysius presents his own rewriting as the basic form of language, which underlies the actual sentence composed by Demosthenes. We are invited to believe that it is not Dionysius who rewrites Demosthenes, but rather Demosthenes who has turned away and deviated from the natural version as reconstructed by Dionysius.

The critic tells us that in the text of Demosthenes ὀλίγου δεῖν has been 'adopted instead of' (παραληφθὲν ἀντί, *Dem.* 9.5) the more common word σχεδόν. Here and elsewhere Dionysius implies that his own metathesis is the natural expression of thought, from which Demosthenes departed for the sake of artistic and rhetorical effect. The technical terms for the underlying, natural expression are ἀκολουθία (logical order) and ὁ κατάλληλος λόγος (syntactically congruent discourse), which were popular in Stoic philosophy. Dionysius' use of these terms anticipates their important role in the grammatical works of Apollonius Dyscolus (second century AD).[18]

Having considered Dionysius' ideas on natural style, let us now examine some connections between Greek criticism and Latin scholarship of the first century BC. Three aspects of the discourse of naturalism allow us to compare Dionysius and his Roman colleagues. Firstly, the general concept of natural style itself; secondly, the idea of nature as a teacher in the imposition of names; and finally, the concept of language as the direct and accurate representation of reality.

3 Cicero on Natural Style

We have seen that Dionysius' praise of natural style is closely related to the principles of Atticism, which favours qualities such as linguistic purity and stylistic clarity. It is therefore not surprising that similar views on natural style can be found in those works of Cicero in which he responds to the so-called *Attici*, Gaius Licinius Calvus and his followers: these works are *Brutus* and *Orator* (46 BC).[19] Authors who adopt the discourse of Atticism regard the language of classical Greek oratory as natural, whereas the prose style of post-classical, Hellenistic writers is often described as artificial and effeminate.[20] We find this discourse for example in the brief history of oratory in Cicero's *Brutus*.[21] Having discussed Isocrates, Lysias, and

[18] On κατάλληλος, see Blank 1982: 24–39, 55–7 and Sluiter 1990: 50–2; 61–9. On ἀκολουθία, see Blank 1982: 16–17 and Sluiter 1990: 13–16. Apollonius Dyscolus, *Pron. GG* 2.1.42.8–9 refers to ἡ κατὰ φύσιν ἀκολουθία, 'the natural sequence'. On Dionysius' use of these terms, see also De Jonge 2008: 261–3.

[19] On the connection between Roman Atticism (C. Licinius Calvus and the *Attici*) and Greek Atticism (Dionysius, Caecilius of Caleacte), see Wisse 1995.

[20] See Dionysius' criticism (*Comp.* 4.15) of Hellenistic historians like Phylarchus of Athens, Duris of Samos, Polybius, Hieronymus of Cardia, etc.

[21] On Cicero's *Brutus*, see the collection of essays edited by Aubert-Baillot and Guérin 2014.

Demosthenes, Cicero introduces some further Attic orators who retained the typical 'natural colour' of Attic eloquence (*Brutus* 36):

> Huic Hyperides proximus et Aeschines fuit et Lycurgus et Dinarchus et is, cuius nulla exstant scripta, Demades aliique plures. haec enim aetas effudit hanc copiam; et, ut opinio mea fert, sucus ille et sanguis incorruptus usque ad hanc aetatem oratorum fuit, in qua naturalis inesset, non fucatus nitor.
>
> Next to Demosthenes in point of time and rank were Hyperides and Aeschines, Lycurgus and Dinarchus, Demades (of whom no writings are extant) and several others. So prodigal was this age in its output; and, as I hold, the sap and blood of oratory remained fresh and uncorrupted down to this time, and retained a natural brightness (*naturalis nitor*) that required no rouge.[22]

The term *fucus* refers to the reddish seaweed from which the Romans made red dye; the oratory of the classical Greek orators did not need such cosmetics or artificial tools.[23] After the classical age, however, oratory declined quickly: Cicero goes on to discuss Demetrius of Phaleron, who was 'the first to modulate oratory and to give it softness and pliability' (*primus inflexit orationem et eam mollem teneramque reddidit*, *Brut.* 38).[24] A similar view on the decline of eloquence, with similar qualifications of post-classical rhetoric as soft, effeminate, and decadent, is presented in Dionysius' preface to his work *On the Ancient Orators,* the so-called manifesto of classicism, and in his treatise *On Composition.*[25] In a discussion of the Hellenistic author Hegesias of Magnesia (*c.* 300 BC), Dionysius points out that 'the manner of description used by the Magnesian could be adopted only by women or emasculated men (ὑπὸ γυναικῶν ἢ κατεαγότων ἀνθρώπων), and not seriously even by them, but in a spirit of mockery or ridicule'.[26]

The distinction between nature and art (τέχνη, in Latin *ars* or *doctrina*) is of course also crucial to Cicero's concept of natural style (*Brutus* 111):

> Quid dicam opus esse doctrina? sine qua etiam si quid bene dicitur adiuuante natura, tamen id, quia fortuito fit, semper paratum esse non potest.

[22] Translation: Hendrickson and Hubbell 1952.
[23] See Douglas 1966 ad loc. For the metaphorical use of *fucus* in rhetorical contexts, see also Cic. *de Orat.*. 2.188, 3.100; *Orat.* 79; Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.6; Tac. *Dial.* 26.1.
[24] Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 12.10.12–13. Chiron 2014 examines Cicero's evaluation of Demetrius of Phalerum.
[25] Dion. Hal. *Orat. Vett.* 1–4. See Hidber 1996 and De Jonge 2014.
[26] Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 18.28. Translation: Usher 1985.

> Need I speak also of the need of theoretical training? For even without it one succeeds in saying something good with nature's help, yet because this is fortuitous it cannot always be at one's disposal.[27]

Where Dionysius picks out Lysias, Cicero selects Marcus Aemilius Scaurus (163–89 BC) as a perfect model of natural style: according to Cicero (*Brutus* 112), Scaurus had a 'natural authority' (*naturalis auctoritas*), and his manner of speaking 'conveyed the impression not only of experience and wisdom, but of that quality which holds the secret of success, namely trustworthiness (*fides*). Thus he possessed by nature (*a natura ipsa*) that which art (*doctrina*) could not easily lend . . .'.[28] Both Cicero and Dionysius distinguish between nature and art, but we should notice that their evaluations of Scaurus and Lysias are in fact different. Scaurus is presented as an orator who had a strictly natural command of speaking: in *De oratore* it is said that Scaurus, 'although not at all a negligible speaker, still relies more on his sound judgement in handling important affairs than on the art of speaking'.[29] Lysias, on the other hand, is an orator whose excellent art of speaking so perfectly imitates nature (i.e. the natural language of laymen) that it hides itself. In other words, the oratory of Scaurus is nature without art, whereas Lysias' style is pure art imitating nature. Cicero and Dionysius agree, however, that art can teach orators to speak naturally like Scaurus. Having introduced Scaurus' natural qualities, Cicero immediately hastens to emphasize that nature cannot do without art: 'As you know the books give precepts for that too' (*huius quoque ipsius rei . . . praecepta sunt*). In other words, rhetorical theory instructs the orator how to make a natural impression – a few decades later Dionysius echoes this point of view when he states that 'to imitate nature is the greatest achievement of art' (*Is.* 16.1, cited above).

4 Varro and Dionysius on Etymology and the Imposition of Names

Let us now consider the connections between Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Marcus Terentius Varro.[30] As I mentioned above, Dionysius used Varro's *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum* as a source for his

[27] Translation: Hendrickson and Hubbell 1952.
[28] *Habebat hoc a natura ipsa, quod a doctrina non facile posset.* Aubert-Baillot 2014: 127–8 discusses Cicero's comparison (*synkrisis*) of Aemilius Scaurus and the Stoic orator Rutilius Rufus.
[29] Cic. *de Orat.* 1.214. Translation: May and Wisse 2001.
[30] Brink 1963 examines the relationship between Varro and Horace, Dionysius' contemporary in Augustan Rome.

own *Antiquitates Romanae*. We do not know whether Dionysius was also familiar with Varro's *De lingua Latina*, which originally consisted of 25 books. The works of both Dionysius and Varro have been described as 'eclectic', as they integrate Aristotelian, Stoic, Alexandrian, and Epicurean thought on language.[31] It is not surprising, then, that common themes and formulations can be identified in the works of these two scholars. Parallels between Varro's work and Dionysius' rhetorical treatises may be explained either by Varronian influence on Dionysius or by a common source or by their being in touch with the intellectual discourse of Rome in the first century BC.[32]

There is one obvious difference between the two authors: whereas the Roman grammarian adopts a descriptive approach to language and its structures, the Greek rhetorician prescribes how language could be used in order to compose effective speeches. Although the aims of their treatises are thus quite different, we can identify a variety of linguistic topics in which both Varro and Dionysius were highly interested. One example is the concept of language as a hierarchical structure, with the word (ὄνομα, *uerbum*) as its primary unit or element: this is a starting point of both Varro's grammatical analysis and Dionysius' theory of composition.[33] Another example concerns the nature of the Latin language. Dionysius' views on the origin of the Latin language as a corrupt dialect of Greek might be related to the theories of Greek grammarians like Philoxenus and Tyrannio, who wrote treatises *On the Dialect of the Romans* and *On the Roman Language*. But there are also connections with Varro's lost work *On the Origin of the Latin Language*.[34] Both Dionysius and Varro suggest a relationship between Latin and Aeolic Greek: Dionysius and the Greek grammarians of the first century BC believed Aeolic to be the language of the early Greek settlers in Italy.[35] A further topic that connects Varro and Dionysius is syntax. It would be extremely rewarding if we were able to compare Dionysius' views on syntax and composition with the lost books

[31] See Taylor 1996: 15–16 on Varro's 'manifest eclecticism' and De Jonge 2008: 34–41 on Dionysius' use of various philosophical, philological, and rhetorical ideas.

[32] The publication date of *De lingua Latina* is uncertain, but it was dedicated to Cicero, who died in 43 BC. See Taylor 1996: 7. This means that the work was available when Dionysius arrived in Rome in 30 BC.

[33] See Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 2.1–3; cf. De Jonge 2008: 50–3. On Varro's parts of speech, see Taylor 1974 and Taylor 1996: 13–14.

[34] Varro *GRFF* 295. De Jonge 2008: 60–5 on Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.90.1.

[35] See Philoxenus fr. 323 (Theodoridis 1976) and Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.20.2–3, 1.90.1; Varro offers Aeolic etymologies of Latin words in *De lingua Latina* 5.25–6, 5.96, 5.101–2. On Varronian etymology, see Schröter 1963, de Melo, in this volume.

14–25 of Varro's *De lingua Latina* on syntax.[36] This third part of his monumental work examined (according to Varro, *De lingua Latina* 8.1) 'how words are combined systematically with each other and produce a sentence' (*ut ea inter se ratione coniuncta sententiam efferant*). This formulation makes us wonder how this Latin account of syntax related to Dionysius' treatise *On Composition,* also known as *On the Arrangement of Words* (Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων). Did Varro, like Dionysius, deal with logical sequence and natural word order? We will probably never know the answer. But fortunately we can point to a few intriguing points of contact between *De lingua Latina* and *De compositione verborum*, which are indeed related to linguistic naturalism.

Varro (*De lingua Latina* 6.3) famously states that 'nature was man's guide for the imposition of names' (*dux fuit ad uocabula imponenda homini*).[37] Dahlmann has suggested that this statement played a role in Varro's ideas on the origin of language, which can only be reconstructed from different parts of his work.[38] These passages suggest that language emerged by an act of imposition (θέσις) by certain name-givers; and that these men 'who first assigned names to things' were guided by nature.[39] It is not exactly clear how nature would have guided them; one possible interpretation is that these men tried to express the nature of a thing in its name, like the name-givers in Plato's *Cratylus*.[40] The very first words may have been onomatopoetic, as Dahlmann suggests: Varro (*De lingua Latina* 7.103–5) elsewhere discusses 'words that are transferred from the cries of animals to men', like 'to bark' (*latrare*), 'to yelp' (*gannire*), 'to bleat' (*dibalare*), and the 'neighing' of horses (*hinnitus*). With these Varronian passages in mind, let us now turn back to Dionysius.

In *On Composition* Dionysius presents four factors that contribute to beautiful and elegant composition: rhythm, variety, and propriety are important, but the first factor is melodious sound (μέλος: *Comp.* 14–16). Having discussed the phonetic qualities of letters and syllables, Dionysius (*Comp.* 16) examines the mimetic quality of words. Writers can use the phonetic properties of letters and syllables to express (and imitate) length of time, size, emotion, brevity, speed, and urgency. Dionysius quotes several lines from Homer, in which the poet uses such onomatopoeic words

[36] For Dionysius' views on syntax, see De Jonge 2011.
[37] On Varro's linguistic naturalism see de Melo, in this volume, Blank, in this volume, and Zetzel, in this volume.
[38] Dahlmann 1932: 12–14.
[39] Cf. Blank, in this volume on the name-giver Adam being guided by his natural, God-given reason.
[40] See Sedley 2003.

as ῥοχθέω ('to dash with a roaring sound'), κλάγξας (from κλάζω, 'to scream'), and ῥοῖζος (the 'whistling' of an arrow).[41] Dionysius states that such words, which 'imitate things' (μιμητικὰ τῶν πραγμάτων), can either be coined, like Homer did, or borrowed from earlier writers. And nature (φύσις) is the great source and teacher in these matters (*Comp.* 16.2–4):

> μεγάλη δὲ τούτων ἀρχὴ καὶ διδάσκαλος ἡ φύσις ἡ ποιοῦσα μιμητικοὺς καὶ θετικοὺς ἡμᾶς τῶν ὀνομάτων, οἷς δηλοῦται τὰ πράγματα κατά τινας εὐλόγους καὶ κινητικὰς τῆς διανοίας ὁμοιότητας· ὑφ' ἧς ἐδιδάχθημεν ταύρων μυκήματα λέγειν καὶ χρεμετισμοὺς ἵππων καὶ φρυαγμοὺς τράγων πυρός τε βρόμον καὶ πάταγον ἀνέμων καὶ συριγμὸν κάλων καὶ ἄλλα τούτοις ὅμοια παμπληθῆ τὰ μὲν φωνῆς μιμήματα, τὰ δὲ μορφῆς, τὰ δὲ ἔργου, τὰ δὲ πάθους, τὰ δὲ κινήσεως, τὰ δ' ἠρεμίας, τὰ δ' ἄλλου χρήματος ὅτου δή. περὶ ὧν εἴρηται πολλὰ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν, τὰ κράτιστα δ' ὡς πρώτῳ τὸν ὑπὲρ ἐτυμολογίας εἰσαγαγόντι λόγον Πλάτωνι τῷ Σωκρατικῷ, πολλαχῇ μὲν καὶ ἄλλῃ μάλιστα δ' ἐν τῷ Κρατύλῳ.
>
> The great source and teacher in these matters is nature (μεγάλη . . . ἀρχὴ καὶ διδάσκαλος ἡ φύσις), who prompts us to imitate and to coin words, by which things are designated according to certain resemblances, which are plausible and capable of stimulating our thoughts. It is she who has taught us to speak of the bellowing of bulls, the whinnying of horses, the bleating of goats, the roar of fire, the beating of winds, the creaking of ropes, and a host of other similar imitations (μιμήματα) of sound, shape, action, feeling, movement, stillness, and anything else whatsoever. These matters have been discussed at length by our predecessors, the most important work being that of the first writer to introduce the subject of etymology, Plato the Socratic, especially in his *Cratylus*, but in many places elsewhere.

Some scholars have interpreted this passage as expressing Stoic views on the origin of language: Schenkeveld in particular has argued that Dionysius here adopts the Stoic theory of the first name-givers, who assigned mimetic names to things.[42] I have argued elsewhere that this interpretation is not correct.[43] Firstly, Dionysius does not talk about first name-givers in a distant past, but about 'us' (ἡμᾶς), i.e. all human beings who use onomatopoetic language to imitate things. Secondly, φύσις is not to be understood as opposed to νόμος or θέσις, but as opposed to τέχνη, just as in Dionysius' discussions of 'natural' style that have been discussed above. The point is that writers of artistic prose and poetry, the practitioners of τέχνη, can learn from what happens in nature (φύσις): in everyday life we

[41] Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 16.1 cites *Od.* 5.402; *Il.* 2.207, 2.210, 16.361.
[42] Schenkeveld 1983: 89.
[43] De Jonge 2008: 70–7.

human beings also use onomatopoetic words, like 'bellowing' or 'whinnying', names that mimetically express things – and this natural (non-technical) use of language can teach poets and orators to do the same thing in artistic prose or poetry. The words διδάσκαλος ἡ φύσις (*Comp.* 16.2) should thus be understood as a Greek equivalent of the Latin dictum *natura artis magistra*, 'Nature is the teacher of art'.

Although I do not believe that this passage makes a philosophical claim about the origin of language, it may well be true that Dionysius is adopting the philosophical discourse of language theory. There are three indications that point in this direction. Firstly, Dionysius refers to a tradition of thinking about etymology, which he traces back to Plato's *Cratylus* (*Comp.* 16.4). He may be particularly thinking of the long etymological section of that dialogue, in which Socrates proposes numerous etymologies, including explanations of mimetic or onomatopoetic words.[44] Secondly, Dionysius states that nature makes us θετικοὺς τῶν ὀνομάτων ('prompt at giving names'), a formulation that echoes philosophical views on the imposition of names, like Varro's *uocabula imponenda* in *De lingua Latina* 6.3 (cited above).[45] Finally, the examples of onomatopoetic words that Dionysius mentions are also known from Stoic sources. His first three examples are 'the bellowing of bulls, the whinnying of horses, and the bleating of goats' (ταύρων μυκήματα, χρεμετισμοὺς ἵππων καὶ φρυαγμοὺς τράγων, *Comp.* 16.3). We have seen that Varro likewise quotes poetic lines containing terms for 'barking' (*latrare*), 'bleating' (*dibalare*), and 'neighing' (*hinnitus*). Augustine (*Dial.* 6) includes similar examples in his discussion of the Stoic views on the origin of language: according to Augustine's (admittedly late) account, the Stoics believed that the first words were formed on the basis of onomatopoeia, like *tinnitus*, *hinnitus*, and *balatus*, 'the clash of bronze, the whinnying of horses, and the bleating of sheep'.[46] It is certainly possible, then, that both Varro and Dionysius preserve traces of Stoic thinking on the origin of language. But if so, they have each applied and adapted the theory so as to fit their purposes – etymology and stylistic composition respectively. Their formulations may sound quite similar in the first instance, but on closer inspection Varro's *natura* turns out to be rather different from Dionysius' φύσις. For the

[44] On the etymologies in Plato's *Cratylus*, see Sedley 2003.

[45] In *Comp.* 16.2 Aujac and Lebel 1981 (following manuscript P) leave out the words καὶ θετικούς (manuscript F), reading ἡ φύσις ἡ ποιοῦσα μιμητικοὺς ἡμᾶς τῶν ὀνομάτων. But μιμητικοὺς τῶν ὀνομάτων makes no sense. I therefore follow Usener 1929 in reading ἡ φύσις ἡ ποιοῦσα μιμητικοὺς καὶ θετικοὺς ἡμᾶς τῶν ὀνομάτων.

[46] On the Stoic views on the origin of language see Verlinsky, in this volume and Blank, in this volume; see further Allen 2005, with reference to Augustine's discussion.

Roman scholar, nature was the guide (*dux*) to the *imposition* of names, so that we are able to explain why things have the names that were once assigned to them; for the Greek rhetorician, on the other hand, human nature is the teacher (διδάσκαλος) of poets and prose writers, showing them how to *use* mimetic words in artistic language.

5 Varro and Dionysius on Language and Reality

Let us finally turn to the relationship between language and reality. We have seen that Dionysius believes that a natural style accurately represents the order of events in reality. Whereas Lysias adopts this 'natural' presentation in his narrations, Isaeus creates obscurity by deviating from the chronological order of events. In the fifth chapter of *On Composition* this concept of natural style as a close and direct representation of reality is further developed in ontological terms. Dionysius sets out to examine if nature (φύσις) could be our guide in the arrangement of words (*Comp.* 5.1–4).[47] It would be 'natural' to place nouns before verbs, as Dionysius asserts; but is the natural order of these parts of speech also more aesthetically pleasing? Dionysius tests both the natural order (noun – verb) and the unnatural order (verb – noun) by comparing examples from the Homeric epics:

> Ἐδόκει δή μοι τῇ φύσει μάλιστα ἡμᾶς ἑπομένους οὕτω δεῖν ἁρμόττειν τὰ μόρια τοῦ λόγου, ὡς ἐκείνη βούλεται. αὐτίκα τὰ ὀνόματα πρότερα ἠξίουν τάττειν τῶν ῥημάτων (τὰ μὲν γὰρ τὴν οὐσίαν δηλοῦν, τὰ δὲ τὸ συμβεβηκός, πρότερον δ' εἶναι τῇ φύσει τὴν οὐσίαν τῶν συμβεβηκότων), ὡς τὰ Ὁμηρικὰ ἔχει ταυτί·
>
> ἄνδρά μοι ἔννεπε Μοῦσα πολύτροπον
> καὶ
> μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά
> καὶ
> ἠέλιος δ' ἀνόρουσε λιπών
>
> καὶ τὰ παραπλήσια τούτοις· ἡγεῖται μὲν γὰρ ἐν τούτοις τὰ ὀνόματα, ἕπεται δὲ τὰ ῥήματα. πιθανὸς ὁ λόγος, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀληθὴς ἔδοξεν εἶναί μοι. ἕτερα γοῦν παράσχοι τις ἂν παραδείγματα παρὰ τῷ αὐτῷ ποιητῇ κείμενα ἐναντίως συντεταγμένα ἢ ταῦτα συντέτακται, καλὰ δὲ οὐχ ἧττον καὶ πιθανά. τίνα οὖν ἐστι ταῦτα·
>
> κλῦθί μευ αἰγιόχοιο Διὸς τέκος Ἀτρυτώνη
> καὶ
> ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι
> μνῆσαι πατρὸς σεῖο, θεοῖς ἐπιείκελ' Ἀχιλλεῦ.

[47] On Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 5 see De Jonge 2008: 273–315.

ἐν γὰρ τούτοις ἡγεῖται μὲν τὰ ῥήματα, ὑποτέτακται δὲ τὰ ὀνόματα· καὶ οὐδεὶς ἂν αἰτιάσαιτο τὴν σύνταξιν ταύτην ὡς ἀηδῆ.

> Well, it seemed to me that we, following nature as much as possible, should fit together the parts of speech as she demands. For example, I thought that I should place nouns before verbs (since the former indicate the substance, the latter the accident, and in the nature of things substance is prior to its accidents). Thus Homer has these lines:
>
> A man, tell me, Muse, the man of many devices (*Od.* 1.1)
> The wrath, sing, goddess (*Il.* 1.1)
> The sun arose, abandoning (*Od.* 3.1)
>
> and others like them, in which the nouns lead and the verbs follow. The theory is persuasive, but I decided that it was not true. At any rate, one could furnish other examples from the same poet in which the arrangement is the opposite of this, and yet these lines are no less beautiful and convincing. What are these examples?
>
> Hear me, child of Zeus who bears the aegis, Atrytone! (*Il.* 5.115)
> Tell me now, you Muses who have dwellings on Olympus (*Il.* 2.484)
> Remember your father, godlike Achilles (*Il.* 24.486)
>
> In these lines the verbs lead the way, and the nouns follow in the second rank; yet no one could criticize this arrangement as unpleasant.

The first set of examples presents lines in which a noun precedes the verb. Dionysius does not pay attention to the syntactic function of the nouns (subject or object), but he has selected Homeric lines in which the noun is the first word. In the second set of examples Dionysius adduces counterexamples that all start with a verb. Dionysius concludes that the rule of nature (nouns precede verbs) is plausible (πιθανός) but not really true (ἀληθής, *Comp.* 5.3). In the rest of the chapter, he presents seven further rules of 'natural' word order: verbs precede adverbs, earlier events are mentioned before later events, substantives precede adjectives, appellative nouns precede proper nouns, pronouns precede appellative nouns, indicatives precede other moods, and finally finite verb forms precede infinitives. I have argued elsewhere that we can understand these natural principles on the basis of philosophical ideas about ontological priority.[48] The Stoic categories seem to play an important role in the hierarchy of parts of speech that Dionysius suggests:[49] in Stoic thinking substance is

[48] De Jonge 2008: 312–15.

[49] The Stoic categories are (1) substance (ὑποκείμενον, οὐσία), (2) quality (ποιόν), divided into (a) commonly qualified (κοινῶς ποιόν) and (b) peculiarly qualified (ἰδίως ποιόν), (3) disposition

prior to quality and disposition, and the commonly qualified is prior to the peculiarly qualified. Dionysius seems to adopt this Stoic perspective when he states that nouns should precede verbs because 'accident' (συμβεβηκός) naturally presupposes 'substance' (οὐσία, *Comp.* 5.2);[50] verbs precede adverbs because circumstances (συνεδρεύοντα) naturally presuppose that which acts or is acted upon (τὸ ποιοῦν ἢ πάσχον, *Comp.* 5.5). Some of the other 'natural' rules can be explained in similar terms, although Dionysius does not make his reasoning explicit. Thus appellative nouns precede proper nouns (presumably) because the peculiarly qualified (Socrates) presupposes the commonly qualified (man).[51] Not surprisingly, it turns out that Homer is oblivious to these rules of nature, so that Dionysius decides to reject his experiment on natural word order (*Comp.* 5.10–11).

What should interest us here is the concept of naturalism underlying Dionysius' linguistic experiment. The starting point of the quest for natural word order is the idea that written or spoken language should mirror reality as closely as possible. For Dionysius this implies that the order of words should ideally not only mirror the chronological order of events (as in Lysias' natural narrations), but also the ontological order of substance, accident, disposition, and circumstances. For the idea that language reflects the natural (logical) order of ontological priorities, we may now turn to a Latin text of the first century BC.

In his discussion of the parts of speech, Varro (*De lingua Latina* 8.12) draws a distinction between 'earlier' and 'later' words, i.e. *priora* (primary) and *posteriora* (secondary): for example, the noun *homo* (man) is primary, the adjective *doctus* (learned) is secondary. Likewise, the verb *scribit* (writes) is primary, whereas the adverb *docte* (learnedly) is secondary:

> Utriusque generis, et uocabuli et uerbi, quaedam priora, quaedam posteriora; priora ut homo, scribit, posteriora ut doctus et docte: dicitur enim homo doctus et scribit docte. Haec sequitur locus et tempus, quod neque homo nec scribit potest sine loco et tempore esse, ita ut magis sit locus homini coniunctus, tempus scriptioni.

(πῶς ἔχον), and (4) relative disposition (πρός τί πως ἔχον). The sources are collected in Hülser 1987–1988, *FDS* 852–65. For a discussion of the Stoic categories, see Menn 1999.

[50] In *Comp.* 5.2 one should read τὰ μὲν γὰρ τὴν οὐσίαν δηλοῦν (manuscript F, followed in the edition by Usener and Radermacher 1904–1929), not τὰ μὲν γὰρ τὴν αἰτίαν δηλοῦν (manuscript P, followed by Aujac and Lebel 1981); note that Aujac and Lebel do read οὐσίαν in the next line.

[51] See *FDS* 849: καὶ οἱ Στωϊκοὶ δὲ τοὺς κοινῶς ποιοὺς πρὸ τῶν ἰδίως ποιῶν ἀποτίθενται. 'Even the Stoics place the commonly qualified individuals before the peculiarly qualified individuals.' Cf. De Jonge 2008: 302–3.

> Of the two kinds, noun and verb, certain words are primary and certain are secondary: primary like *homo* 'man' and *scribit* 'writes', and secondary like *doctus* 'learned' and *docte* 'learnedly', for we say *homo doctus* 'a learned man' and *scribit docte* 'writes learnedly'. These ideas are attended by those of place and time, because neither *homo* nor *scribit* can be asserted without the presupposition of place and time – yet in such a way that place is more closely associated with the idea of the noun *homo*, and time more closely with the act of writing.[52]

Varro further explains (*De lingua Latina* 8.13) that the noun is 'first' and prior to the verb and the remaining words:

> Cum de his nomen sit primum (prius enim nomen est quam uerbum temporale et reliqua posterius quam nomen et uerbum), prima igitur nomina: quare de eorum declinatione quam de uerborum ante dicam.
>
> Since among these the noun is first – for the noun is earlier than the verb and the remaining words are later relatively to the noun and the verb – the nouns are accordingly first. Therefore I will speak of the form-variations of nouns before I take up those of verbs.[53]

The noun is said to be 'earlier' (*prius*) than the verb: it is clear that Varro is here talking about ontological priority: the adjective *doctus* presupposes a man (*homo*), the adverb *docte* presupposes the act of writing (*scribit*), and the noun is 'prior' to the verb because – as Dionysius would say – to act or to be acted upon presupposes substance.

The latter view about the relative hierarchy of nouns and verbs can also be found in later grammatical texts, like Apollonius Dyscolus' *Syntax* (second century AD) and Priscian's *Institutiones* (ca. 500 AD).[54] Priscian argues that the pronoun and the noun precede the verb, because the former indicate substance and person, 'which must naturally be prior to the act itself' (*prior esse debet naturaliter*):[55]

> Sciendum tamen, quod recta ordinatio exigit, ut pronomen uel nomen praeponatur uerbo, ut 'ego et tu legimus', 'Virgilius et Cicero scripserunt', quippe cum substantia et persona ipsius agentis uel patientis, quae per pronomen uel nomen significatur, prior esse debet naturaliter quam ipse actus, qui accidens est substantiae.

[52] Translation: Kent 1951. [53] Translation: Kent 1951.

[54] Apollonius Dyscolus, *Synt.* 1.16: in the (theoretical) hierarchy of the parts of speech the noun (ὄνομα) precedes the verb (ῥῆμα) because 'to act and to be acted upon' (τὸ διατιθέναι καὶ τὸ διατίθεσθαι) is peculiar to a body (σῶμα).

[55] Priscian, *Institutiones Grammaticae* 17.105 (*GL* 3.164.16–21).

> One must know that right order requires that the pronoun or the noun should be placed before the verb, as 'I and you are reading', 'Virgil and Cicero have written', inasmuch as the substance and person of the one who acts or suffers, which is designated through the pronoun or the noun, must naturally be prior to the act itself, which is an accident of the substance.

The act itself (*ipse actus*) is 'an accident of the substance' (*accidens substantiae*). Priscian's terminology closely corresponds to that of Dionysius (*Comp.* 5), who as we have seen above asserts that accident (τὸ συμβεβηκός) presupposes substance (οὐσία). Varro's rules of ontological priority in *De lingua Latina* 8.12–13 (cited above) in fact correspond to three of Dionysius' principles of presupposition: nouns precede verbs, verbs precede adverbs, and substantives precede adjectives. The difference is of course that for Varro, as far as we can tell, these rules have no consequences for the practical word order of a real sentence. The Roman scholar uses the rules of ontological priority to demonstrate the rational order of language, which also determines the order in which he discusses the linguistic items in his treatise. Dionysius takes a similar view on language and its relationship to reality, but he – unsuccessfully – attempts to apply the theoretical order of linguistic units to the practical level of word arrangement. Fortunately, Homer was there to stop Dionysius from pursuing this project any further.

At the end of the first century AD, Dionysius' experiment with natural word order is echoed in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria.* In his discussion of *naturalis ordo* (9.4.23), which is part of his treatment of composition, Quintilian adopts a more practical perspective on the matter. He identifies natural order with the regular order of common speech: we are used to say 'men and women', 'day and night', 'rising and setting' (*'uiros ac feminas', 'diem ac noctem', 'ortum et occasum'*), although the opposite order is also fine, as Quintilian points out. But he has less patience for the more philosophical aspects of natural order. Where Dionysius set up a linguistic competition between nature and Homer, the Roman rhetorician rejects the logical rules of nature right away (9.4.23–5):

> Illa nimia quorundam fuit obseruatio, ut uocabula verbis, uerba rursus aduerbiis, nomina adpositis et pronominibus essent priora: nam fit contra quoque frequenter non indecore. Nec non et illud nimiae superstitionis, uti quaeque sint tempore, ea facere etiam ordine priora, non quin frequenter sit hoc melius, sed quia interim plus ualent ante gesta ideoque leuioribus superponenda sunt.
>
> The rule given by some theorists, that nouns should precede verbs, verbs adverbs, nouns adjectives, and pronouns nouns, is much too rigid, for the

> contrary order is often excellent. Another piece of gross superstition is the idea that as things come first in time, so they should also come first in order. It is not that this is not frequently the better course, but earlier events are sometimes more important and so have to be given a position of climax over the less significant.[56]

6 Conclusion

The ancient rhetorical views on natural style are in various ways connected to notions of linguistic naturalism. For Dionysius, natural style is first of all the language that consciously imitates the non-technical speech of laymen. On a second level, however, nature also requires that the words follow the ideas and accurately represent the events in the order in which they actually happened. Natural language is thus understood as a perfect representation of reality, reflecting and mirroring the logical, chronological, and ontological order of the extra-linguistic world.

Dionysius' views on natural style can be fruitfully related to the ideas of Roman authors; Cicero shares his interest in the naturalism of Attic oratory; Varro makes observations on the role of nature in the imposition of names, and he likewise believes that language to a certain extent represents the order of reality. In all these texts, the 'natural' is always good – nature is the primary model and the final aim in both grammar and rhetoric. This may be the most remarkable result of a comparison between Greek and Latin scholarship on linguistic naturalism in the first century BC: φύσις and *natura* can mean many different things, but all grammarians and rhetoricians, both Greek and Roman, agree that nature is our 'guide' (*dux*), 'our great source and teacher' (ἀρχὴ καὶ διδάσκαλος).

[56] Translation: Russell 2001.